



SPRING / SUMMER 2017



Unity Beyond State Lines

Delaware Department of Correction Visits NJDOC Central Office Headquarters

On a day that was supposed to be one of the happiest of his life, Commissioner Perry Phelps of the Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) experienced one of the worst days imaginable. On February 1, Phelps was to be ceremoniously sworn into his newly appointed post as commissioner when inmates sieged Building C at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center near Smyrna, taking several officers and civilian staff members hostage.

The standoff lasted 18 hours. At the end of it all, for the first time in the history of the Delaware DOC, the department lost an officer in the line of duty – Lieutenant Steven Floyd, Sr.

Floyd dedicated his life to protecting the citizenry of the First State, a mission he upheld until his last moments. He is credited with saving the lives of his co-workers, as he warned his fellow officers of the hostage situation and sacrificed himself to ensure the safety of others.



Representatives from the Delaware and New Jersey corrections departments met to celebrate the life of the late Delaware Lieutenant Steven Floyd, Sr., who tragically perished during an incident at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in February. Pictured are (from left) Major David Scott of the NJDOC Special Operations Group, NJDOC Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan, Delaware DOC Commissioner Perry Phelps, Officer David Giordano and his canine partner, Floyd, of the NJDOC Canine Unit and Delaware DOC Canine Officer Brett Foraker.

"Not only did I know Lieutenant Floyd, but I worked with him for five years when I was the warden of the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center," said Phelps, who was appointed as Commissioner on January 18. "He was a good man."

What happened in Delaware shook corrections agencies across the nation.

"The incident that took place at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in February is a stark reminder of how quickly the environment can change, and, in fact, how dangerous the job of a correction officer actually is," said New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Commissioner Gary M. Lanigan.

In a heartfelt tribute to the lieutenant who lost his life, Senior Correction Officer David Giordano of the NJDOC's Special Operations Group (SOG) bestowed his new canine partner with the name he felt was most worthy – Floyd.

"My wife, my children and I were trying to come up with names," said Giordano, who tested at least eight dogs before settling on a 16-month-old Belgian Malinois. "I was reading an article about Steven Floyd and the ultimate sacrifice he made, and I couldn't think of a more honorable name to give my dog."

Lieutenant Frank Martin, supervisor of the NJDOC Canine Unit, was in complete agreement.

"Being involved with the canine unit for about 10 years now, I always expect names like Diesel, Axel or Zeus," said Martin. "It hit me that it was two and a half weeks after the tragedy in Delaware. I realized what Officer Giordano was trying to do and what he was trying to say. It is absolutely the best name for his new canine partner."

Giordano expected no fanfare for his decision, but when officials from the Delaware DOC became aware of his gesture, they decided to journey to the NJDOC's Central Office headquarters in Trenton to meet canine Floyd and his handler. That visit took place on May 11.

They were warmly welcomed by NJDOC staff and administration.

"First and foremost, the department would like to offer our sincere condolences to the Delaware DOC and the Floyd family for the loss of the lieutenant," Lanigan said as he addressed Delaware and New Jersey corrections staff during a ceremony marking the visit.

"I'd also like to thank Officer Giordano for his sincere gesture honoring the Delaware DOC and the Floyd family by naming his canine in memory of Lieutenant Floyd,"

Lanigan added. "I know that the handler and his canine will honor the Floyd memory by diligently protecting our department's staff as well as the citizens of New Jersey."

The meeting of the two corrections departments was also a valuable opportunity to discuss and exchange techniques and ideas.

"Working together makes everyone stronger," said Canine Officer Brett Foraker, who has been with the Delaware DOC for 11 years and also worked with Floyd.

Although each department has unique methods, one thing that everyone agreed on was the importance of the canine units.

"Having my canine partner with me is like having another set of eyes to watch my back," Foraker said. "The dog has the sense to know when it is safe or not."

Major David Scott of the NJDOC SOG pointed out that the canines serve as a link to outside law enforcement agencies and the community.

"We get called in to help with finding lost children and elderly folks throughout the state," said Scott. "For me, that's personal. It really touches my heart."

Lanigan added: "The canine unit is one of the department's most positive links to the community."

The profound impact of canine units was certainly made evident by the convergence of the Delaware and New Jersey corrections departments to celebrate Lieutenant Floyd and the NJDOC's new canine named in his tribute.

"I know canine handlers and their partners have a special bond," said Phelps. "For Officer Giordano to name his canine after Lieutenant Floyd is an honor to his memory."





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Ready... Set... Grow!

Jones Farm Horticulture Program Impresses at 2017 Flower Show



Pictured above are students in the Horticulture Program at Jones Farm who contributed to the award-winning plants entered into the 2017 Philadelphia Flower Show. Back row (from left): Christopher Smith, Anthony Riggins, Joel Vreeland. Front row (from left): Instructor Debbie Mahon, Travis Whittington, Clifford Sauer, ShaDid Faunt'Leroy.

The work of the students in the New Jersey Department of Corrections Horticulture Program at Jones Farm impressed the judges yet again at this year's Philadelphia Flower Show, which took place from March 11 to 19.

It helps that instructor Debbie Mahon has been dedicated to horticulture for nearly four decades, and she has been involved with the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society, which organizes this internationally recognized event, since she was just 10 years old. Thanks to her knowledge and expertise, as well as the meticulous work of her students, the program's 32 entries in the competition earned an impressive 38 awards, including four coveted rosettes for the class' prized Kit Kat begonia, which actually suffered some damage in transport to the show.

"Someone cut me off in traffic, and the Kit Kat begonia fell over and rolled," Mahon recounted. "We had to remove about 100 damaged leaves, but my students have done so well caring for this plant and it has so many layers of leaves that it was hardly noticeable that anything happened."

Mahon explained that packing for the show is just as important as maintaining the plants. The program's participants pack and arrange each plant for transport, and Mahon drives the entries to the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, calling upon volunteers from her local garden club to help set up the display.

The care of the show entries is a year-round process. There are several factors to consider in the maintenance of each plant, such as the weather and pests. Students learn effective methods to keep the plants healthy, but they also learn to problem solve based on the condition of the plants and their environment.

For example, the Kit Kat begonia, which is about three years old, had been wilting prior to the show.



The Kit Kat begonia (front), flanked by the rosemary plant (left) and the lavender, which was the challenge plant.

"She was being overwatered, but now she's bounced back," explained Glenn Parker, who has been participating in the program for about a year. "We learned that we only have to water her one or two times a week, depending on the weather."

"It's not just about throwing seeds and water on the ground," Joel Vreeland said. Vreeland has been in the program for about a month, but he has previous experience in landscaping and construction work.

"There's a lot to learn, seeing what works and what doesn't," Vreeland added, noting that there is a certain amount of trial and error involved with horticulture along with the well-established methods.

Another entry in the show was a rosemary plant, which, at nearly seven years old, looks more like a small tree than the typical herb plant. Travis Whittington, who has been in the program for a year, has been taking especial care of the rosemary, painstakingly brushing bugs and dirt off of each of the plant's needle-like leaves.

Mahon pointed out that it is unusual for older plants to be entered into the Philadelphia Flower Show, let alone win so many awards. Mahon said that most participants purchase plants and grow them specifically for the show that season.

As explained by Mahon, flowers and plants entered into the 2017 show must have been in one's possession by December 30, 2016. Items were pre-entered by January 15, and they had to be show-quality by the first day of the show on March 11.

Also a standout in the competition was the class' lavender plant. Lavender was this year's challenge plant in the show, and the NJDOC Horticulture Program's specimen earned second place out of 15 entries in the experienced class of competitors.

The Horticulture Program has been participating in the Philadelphia Flower Show since 2009. That year, the group submitted 10 plants and earned four ribbons, which is admirable because beginners typically go at least three years before earning any awards, according to Mahon.

"I try to go to the flower show every year, but it was extra special for me this year because these are my students," said Rakima Stokes-Little, who has served as the Supervisor of Educational Services for the Central Reception and Assignment Facility and New Jersey State Prison since January 2017. "It was very rewarding to see the success of their hard work."

The Philadelphia Flower Show isn't the program's only focus. The class cultivates about 300 flats each season, growing an array of plants and vegetables, including cabbage and other cole crops, as well as nearly 150 varieties of tomatoes.

Some of these flats are grown for causes such as Isles Inc., a nonprofit community development and environmental organization based in Trenton. Isles Inc. supplies the soil, seeds and other needed materials to the Horticulture Program, and the students get the plants off to a hearty start before returning the crops to the organization to be planted and harvested.

The program also provides plants to NJDOC facilities and departmental events.

Through the Horticulture Program, the students get hands-on experience and job training, including the opportunity to participate in several certification programs, such as flagging and traffic control, 10-hour construction safety, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection pesticide license and Occupational Safety and Health Administration forklift.

"I liken this program to an internship," said Mahon, who is a graduate of the Longwood Gardens Training Program and earned her teaching certification through the Alternate Route program. "My students are not just getting an education, they are getting hands-on experience, too."

"Everything Debbie tells us is something educational," Parker stated. "Debbie really cares about the program and the inmates."

When Mahon first joined the program in September 2008, she had four students and no certification programs. Now, Mahon regularly has about 14 students in her class with open enrollment, and approximately 30 students complete the program each year.

"The NJDOC has been very supportive of the growth of the program," said Mahon. "The program is not just about plants, it's about on the job training, career preparedness and personal growth."





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Always on Duty

Officer Aids in Second Emergency Situation in One Year

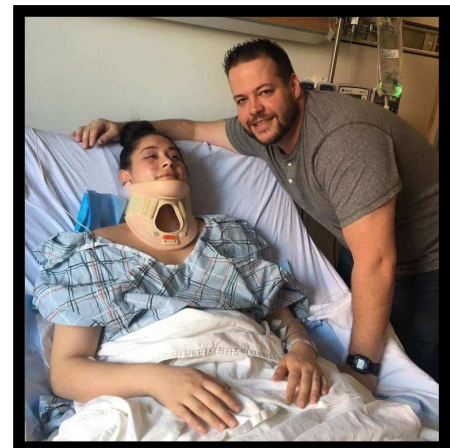
The New Jersey Department of Corrections trains its correction officers on how to respond to a variety of emergency situations, from CPR lessons to defensive tactic exercises. In some instances, officers may use skills they've learned from this training outside of their daily duties.

In September 2016, Sergeant Stephen Burke of the Central Reception and Assignment Facility was traveling home from work when he and five other officers from New Jersey State Prison and Garden State Youth Correctional Facility stopped to help a man after seeing an overturned vehicle on the side of I-195. Incredibly, Burke faced yet another incident less than a year later.

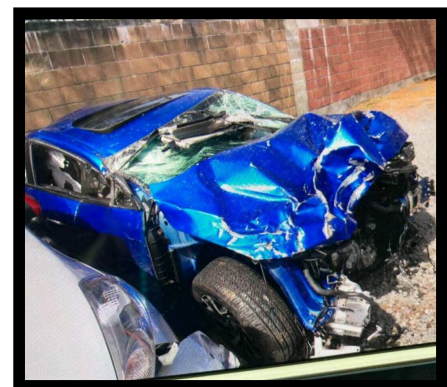
On March 12, Burke was on his way to work early in the morning when he once again stopped to aid an individual on the side of the highway.

"I was heading westbound on I-195, and I looked over and saw a vehicle in the woods on the opposite side of the highway," said Burke. "There was fire coming out of the engine, and I immediately turned around to help."

By the time Burke got there, a civilian was already on scene. The victim had pulled herself out of her burning



Sergeant Stephen Burke poses with victim Perla Castro, 23, the day after her accident.



Castro's vehicle rolled multiple times before colliding with a tree on the side of the highway.

vehicle, and the civilian dragged her away and put the flames out with a fire extinguisher he had in his car.

Burke and the civilian worked to keep the victim, 23-year-old Army reservist Perla Castro, stable while they waited for medical aid to arrive.

Burke noted that the commotion of the event did not faze him, and the training he received from the NJDOC is to thank for that.

"It was chaotic," Burke stated. "And in situations like that, you have to be able to remain calm. You have to be able to assess the situation and prioritize, just as we do here in the prisons.

"You can't be overwhelmed," he added. "You need to be in total control."

Burke, who has been with the department since 2010, advises new members of the custody staff that once they become officers, they are never off-duty.

"If you see something and stop," Burke said, "everyone will expect you to know what you're doing.

"As a law enforcement officer, you're going to be in a position at some point where you'll have to take control. It doesn't matter if you're 18 years old — even a 40-year-old man is going to look to you to take control. So be prepared. You could be the difference between life and death."

While the NJDOC has taught Burke valuable lessons, he has not stopped learning from situations like these.

"I take that road every day to and from work, and now this is the second fatal or near-fatal accident I've seen in that same spot," he said. "So it definitely gives you a wake-up call."

Burke visited Castro at the hospital the very next day and has kept in touch with her since.

"She's doing a lot better," Burke said. "The doctors don't believe there is going to be any long-term damage, so she should make a full recovery."





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Calm, Cool, Collected

NJDOC Social Worker Expertly Handles Emergency Situation

In the field of corrections, all staff members must be prepared to face any situation that may arise. Fortunately, social worker Christina Sellitto was able to draw from her training and experience when an emergency medical situation occurred during one of her classes at South Woods State Prison.

While conducting a session of Engaging the Family on March 20, one of the many programs offered through the Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services (OSAPAS), Sellitto observed one of her participants shouting and shaking.

"The inmate started screaming and waving his hands," Sellitto said. She immediately recognized that her student was having a seizure.



Christina Sellitto, who has been a social worker with the NJDOC since October 2016, reviews materials for her next Engaging the Family session.

"I told the class that he was having a seizure, and I asked the other inmates to hold him in his seat and to move the desks and everything else away from him," she said.

The class of 14 inmates moved quickly to assist in steadying their classmate in his seat. Sellitto pressed the red emergency button, which stopped movement throughout the facility until the situation was addressed. She also sent an inmate to get the attention of a nearby officer.

In the short time it took for help to arrive, the inmate was moved to the floor to lie on his side. One classmate removed one of his shirts to form a pillow.

"I did what I know and what I am trained to do," said Sellitto, who has been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections since October 2016. "If I get escalated, everybody will get escalated. I'm happy that everyone worked together as a team to help."

When medical staff arrived, the inmate was out of his seizure and relaxing. He was placed on a stretcher and taken to the infirmary for further evaluation.

"We are extremely proud of Ms. Sellitto's prompt call to action, as we are well aware that every second is critically important during medical emergencies," said OSAPAS Supervising Program Development Specialist Adam Cortes. "Her actions are even more impressive considering that she is a relatively new employee to the NJDOC. She went right back to facilitating her groups without any reservations."

For Sellitto, it was just part of the job.

"In the fields of social work and corrections, anything is a possibility," she said. "You never know what the day will bring."

Sellitto facilitates Engaging the Family classes at South Woods State Prison twice per week. Her sessions are open to inmates who are within six months to a year of their release date.

The Engaging the Family program helps with anger management, financial education, substance abuse/relapse prevention, and marriage, relationship and parenting skills. The program also provides individual case management, as well as support and resources for six months after release.

"The most rewarding part is that the inmates come to my group consistently," said Sellitto, who also noted that her class is optional. "I don't get many drops or withdrawals."

Sellitto has previous training and experience in social work – and in handling medical emergencies – through her work with the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, now known as Child Protection and Permanency under the Department of Children and Families, where she worked for three years. During that time, Sellitto said that she had several clients with medical conditions.

Sellitto also did crisis outreach work in Burlington and Camden counties, worked with individuals with disabilities in a group home and interned at the Monmouth County Youth Detention Center. It was that internship that inspired her goal to work in corrections.

She was so determined, in fact, that she arrived to her interview at Central Office headquarters in a walking cast, which she required after having suffered an injury to her right ankle.

"Ever since my internship with the Monmouth County Youth Detention Center I knew I wanted to make a difference in the lives of offenders," Sellitto said. "Corrections is always where I wanted to be."





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Just My Job

NJDOC Employee Aids Teenagers Following Automobile Accident

Her day had ended, but her work was just beginning.

Driving home from work late last fall, New Jersey Department of Corrections employee KerryAnn Sutter witnessed an accident right in front of her and stopped to aid in the emergency situation.



KerryAnn Sutter has been with the Office of Employee Relations since the spring of 2015.

"As I was coming up on Route 29, a vehicle two cars in front of me started veering to the left and then pulled a hard right as if the driver realized he was going to hit the median," said Sutter, who has been with the department's Office of Employee Relations since April 2015. "The car came across the two lanes, hit the guardrail and flipped. At that time, I noticed no one was stopping, and I pulled over."

Soon after Sutter pulled over to help, another civilian stopped as well, and they both approached the vehicle.

"It was smoking, and the wheels were still turning," Sutter explained. "The driver walked out of the car unharmed, and then we saw that there were two other individuals in the car, and they were actually able to crawl out."

"At that time," Sutter added, "I noticed that there was fluid coming out of the car, so I advised everyone to get back toward my car, just in case it was gasoline or oil."

Three teenagers had been heading home from school when the driver fell asleep behind the wheel. Two of the individuals in the car were virtually unharmed, but the front passenger appeared to suffer an injury to his leg. Police immediately arrived on scene.

"This isn't the first accident I've stopped for," she added. "To me, it's not a big deal — it's part of what I do."

In addition to working full-time with the NJDOC, Sutter also works as a veterinary technician and has experience as a swim coach. Sutter appreciates these professions, as she's able to help people (and animals) regularly.

"I always want to help people," Sutter stated. "So if I see someone hurt, I'm going to stop and help. I do not help people for the recognition, nor would I ever expect it. I help others because it is what I am supposed to do."





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Lifelong Love of Learning

Longtime NJDOC Teacher Looks Back on Her Career of Nearly 40 Years

The moment Betty Romano stepped foot inside a correctional facility, she knew that was where she wanted to work.

A teacher at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility in Yardville, Romano began her career back in 1978 at the New Jersey Training School for Boys in Skillman, where she also did her student teaching.

"I went on a tour at the Training School in Skillman, and in the first five minutes I was there, I knew I wanted to work there," Romano reminisced. "The students were so unfortunate, and I wanted to make a difference in their lives. I knew right away that's where I wanted to be."

Getting to that point, however, nearly didn't happen.

As she was finishing up high school, Romano was preparing to go to secretarial school because she could not afford to attend college. It was a guidance counselor, noting her straight-As, who encouraged her to pursue a college degree.



Betty Romano sits in her classroom at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, where she has worked for the past quarter-century.

Inspired by that push, Romano applied for and received several scholarships, and she saved on housing costs by commuting back and forth to earn her teaching degree in special education from Trenton State College (now known as The College of New Jersey).

"What happened to me makes me want to push my students forward, because I wouldn't have gone to college if someone didn't push me," Romano said.



Betty Romano, who was selected as Garden State's 2017 Teacher of the Year, poses with Supervisor of Educational Services Mark Yaros

Romano spent more than a decade at the Training School for Boys. During that time, she was instrumental in putting together a presentation of "We Are the World," which was a wildly successful song that, in 1985, assembled some of the biggest music stars of the time, including Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, Cyndi Lauper and Bruce Springsteen, to perform the charity single to benefit famine relief in Africa.

Romano helped organize students and staff members to perform their own version of the song on stage for Channel 13 in the mid-80s.

"We were pretty famous for about a year," Romano recounted. "It was a fantastic performance. It was definitely one of the highlights of my career."

Aside from teaching basic skills and special education, Romano also managed the volunteer tutor program at the Skillman facility.

"The kids and the tutors really bonded," said Romano. "The tutor would usually become a mom or dad figure in the child's life."

After the Training School for Boys closed in 1992, Romano continued her career at Garden State on June 13 of that year, and she has remained there ever since.

"I remember walking through the door, I remember what I wore," Romano said. "I'm one of the only ones left from the Training School in Skillman. Most everyone else has retired."

There is at least one person left at Garden State who began at the Skillman facility – Administrator Derick Loury, who started at the Training School as a teacher in 1989. The two worked especially closely in producing a Black History Month program.

Loury was assigned as the Administrator of Garden State in June 2015.

"Ms. Romano has always been very passionate and dedicated in working with young offenders," Loury said. "She has a way of disarming the fear and anxieties they have about being uneducated. She really motivates them and increases their confidence that they are capable of learning."

As a Title 1 teacher, Romano, who recently celebrated her 25th anniversary at Garden State, pulls small groups and individuals into her classroom for remedial work in reading, English, math, language, life skills, English as a Second Language and job skills.

"She has a patience unlike anyone else, coupled with her skill level to work through learning disabilities to get results," Loury stated.

Mark Yaros, who has served as the supervisor of educational services at Garden State for the past four months, also has high praise for Romano and her teaching style.

"Ms. Romano has been nothing but professional and a true team player," said Mark Yaros. "She has a high expectation of her students."

Assistant Supervisor of Educational Services Debra Bolden, who has worked with Romano for many years, noted that there have been several instances where students have visited the education office to say that Romano was the best teacher they ever had.

"Ms. Romano is a kind, focused and responsible educator who always puts her students first," Bolden said. "She cares about their struggles and their accomplishments. She challenges her students to do their best and encourages them on days they feel like they can't."

For Romano, the most rewarding part of her job is to see the growth and success of the inmates she teaches. Former students often send cards or call to update her and the education staff on their current pursuits.

"One of my first students couldn't read at all, and now he's writing novels," said Romano. "It's great to see someone go through such a transformation."

To showcase her students' work and progress, Romano puts together annual newsletters featuring poetry, stories and drawings done by her Title 1 classes.

"There is a lot of talent here," Romano said. "The newsletter is a way for my students to be creative and show off the work they are capable of doing. It gives an insight into how they feel, too."

Romano has taken on additional roles and responsibilities outside of the classroom, including volunteering her time on the annual graduation, mock job interview, job fair, winter assembly, fatherhood program and staff holiday party committees.

"Ms. Romano is always a real help," Yaros said. "She thinks outside the box to get things accomplished. She never hesitates to take care of what needs to be done."

Romano has also been an active member of the American Correction Association and the Correctional Education Association, where she currently serves as Secretary of the New Jersey unit.

In recognition of her efforts throughout the years, Romano has been bestowed several honors. She was selected as Teacher of the Year once at Skillman and twice at Garden State, including this year. She was also chosen to receive the John D. Steinline Memorial Award from the New Jersey Department of Corrections Adult Board of Trustees in 1996.

During her nearly four decades as a teacher in corrections, Romano said she has been asked numerous times: If you could go back and start over, what would you do differently?

Her response is: "I'd want to be doing what I'm doing – or be an undercover cop. I've also always wanted to be Tweety Bird at Six Flags Great Adventure. Maybe I'll do that after I retire."

For Romano, retirement is on the horizon, but when the time arrives, it will be a bittersweet moment.

The plan was for Romano and her husband, Peter, to be in retirement together. They both began their careers in corrections on September 1, 1978, with Betty at the

Training School for Boys in Skillman and Peter at the Training School for Boys in Jamesburg.

"My husband started out as a gym teacher before becoming an officer," explained Romano. "He went to Garden State in 1991. He was promoted to Acting Sergeant, Sergeant and Lieutenant. They called him 'Bloodhound' because he was so good at searching and knew everything about the prisons."

Peter Romano worked at Northern State Prison, Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center and Mid-State Correctional Facility before retiring in 2011. He then worked as a building supervisor at the Albert M. "Bo" Robinson Assessment and Treatment Center.

Sadly, Peter Romano passed away unexpectedly in March of this year.

This tragedy has made Betty Romano think seriously about the future and her impending retirement. She looks forward to traveling and spending more time with her two children and two grandchildren. However, she has yet to "push the button" and send in her application.

"I will miss teaching terribly," Romano said. "I am fortunate to really love what I do. After I eventually retire, if an opportunity arose for me to come back and help teach in corrections, I would fly back. It's where my heart is."

Romano said she often gets worried looks and questions if she walks out of work with an armful of papers. Clearly, her students and coworkers will miss her, too.

"It will be hard to replace her," Loury said. "Ms. Romano isn't here working, she does her job naturally. She is always conscientious of making an impression on her students and giving them every opportunity to get a quality education."

Romano's advice for anyone pursuing a career as a teacher in corrections is to be fair, firm and consistent, and to build a rapport and mutual respect with the inmates. She also said that using humor inside and outside of the classroom has been helpful.

"You can't change the world," Romano said, "but you can make a difference in the inmates' lives, one at a time."





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Stomp Out Stigma

NJDOC Holds CISM Recruitment Event to Help Support Correctional Staff

If you work in a correctional setting, you're going to have to deal with stress. This is why the New Jersey Department of Corrections has several ways in which it provides care to officers and civilian staff at correctional facilities.

"We have to be there for our employees," said Assistant Commissioner Dr. Darcella Sessomes. "It's important to provide them with support and let them know that we're there for them. They're more than just workers — they're the fabric of the department."

One of the ways in which employees may receive necessary aid is through the Critical Incident and Stress Management (CISM) program. This peer support system, which operates under the Division of Programs and Community Services, was designed to provide assistance and support to NJDOC employees and their families during critical incidents, such as staff assaults, line-of-duty deaths, severe injuries and other traumatic experiences. Its goal is to stabilize the negative impacts of tragic events.

"CISM is crucial," Sessomes said. "It provides support during very stressful times, particularly after the death of a coworker. And in an environment like the DOC, many employees have been around for 10, 15, 20 years, so they become family. When there is a loss, it's not just a loss of a coworker, it's a loss of a member of their work family."



Amanda Trombetta managed the resource table at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility.

CISM Coordinator Amanda Trombetta added: "A lot of correctional employees hold their emotions inside because most of them are around inmates, and they don't want inmates to pick up on anything that may be off with them. So CISM gives employees an outlet where they can express how they're feeling, cry or do whatever they need to do so that they don't take it out on their colleagues, inmates or their loved ones."

The NJDOC's Office of Victim Services (OVS) held one of its largest CISM recruitment events ever. The effort also helped to raise awareness for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and suicide prevention.

"These are subjects that no one really wants to talk about," Trombetta said. "So we have to be in their faces and show them that there is help out there. And this is one way of doing that — just physically being out there."

OVS selected one day to visit each correctional facility to display a resource table, which provided comprehensive information about PTSD, suicide prevention, mental health and peer support. It brought awareness to various needs of the department, such as the need to have a strong CISM team and the need to be supportive and aware of PTSD symptoms and mental health conditions in employees, Sessomes said.

Nearly 20 percent of adults in the United States will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, inhibiting their personal lives, work performance and relationships. That is why various organizations across the country, including the NJDOC, strive to spread awareness and promote treatment for individuals who suffer from mental health conditions.

After visiting 13 state correctional facilities, the department gained 232 CISM recruits, which Sessomes said made it the largest CISM recruitment event since she became assistant commissioner three years ago. In addition to the sign-ups, more than 1,100 employees were engaged in the event.

"It was phenomenal," said Social Worker Gladian Rivera, who has been with the department for six months. "I actually had lines of people waiting to visit the table."

Rivera and Trombetta split the facilities and manned their own tables during the event's run.

"I went to six different facilities," Rivera said. "Each facility sort of has its own personality. There were individuals at each who made the vibe much more energetic. And I felt that, collectively, the NJDOC came together not only to provide support but to bring forth this positive energy. As a newcomer, seeing this is fantastic."

The events operated under the motto "Stomp Out Stigma" in an effort to destigmatize the negative connotations of terms like PTSD and suicide. There was also a photo challenge with the hashtag "#StompOutStigma" in which employees who had their photos taken with the hashtag were entered into a raffle to win special prizes.

Numerous employees at each facility participated in the event.



Officers and employees at each correctional facility actively participated in the "#StompOutStigma" photo challenge.

"We were extremely excited with the response," Sessomes stated. "We felt that the project was very well received by staff. And for it to be our first one, we couldn't have been more pleased with the outcome.

"I'd like to thank the administrators at each facility for actively participating in the event and encouraging staff to be involved as well," she added.

The event was conceptualized toward the end of April, and the division spent five weeks researching and planning in what Rivera considered a "very creative process."

"I was very proud — those ladies pulled it off," said Sessomes, commenting on how invested Rivera and Trombetta were in the project.

"I'm really happy about the way everything turned out," said Trombetta. "A lot of people were really appreciative. A lot of civilians and officers came up to me and thanked me for being there, and they said that it was really needed in the department, and they're happy that something is finally being done to 'stomp out the stigma.'"

OVS plans to make this an annual event.

"Our goal for next year," Sessomes explained, "is to make it an even bigger event to really bring awareness to the stress that people have while working in a correctional environment. We hope to continue to shed light on issues that everyone is dealing with and be supportive of our employees."





SPRING / SUMMER 2017



Push Yourself

Corrections Officer Wins Benefit Bench Press Competition

There aren't many men or women who could bench press 500 pounds and make it look easy, but one of the New Jersey Department of Corrections' own officers gets trophies for doing it.

In May 2017, Senior Correction Officer Tristen Solomon of East Jersey State Prison finished first in Bench for Blue, an annual charity powerlifting event held by the Policeman's Benevolent Association Local 127 of Old Bridge. While powerlifting is a strength sport that consists of bench presses, squats and deadlifts, this particular competition solely consisted of bench pressing, and it brought together officers and supporters from around the state.



Officer Tristen Solomon has been powerlifting regularly for two years.

"This was my first competition for that particular event," said Solomon, who has been powerlifting for two years. "It's very similar to other competitions I've competed in, but this one was a little different, because it was for charity — it was for 'blue' — so it was special to me."

The competition was held in a gym at the city's YMCA. Competitors' family members, friends and colleagues crowded the gym to cheer them on.

"The energy of the crowd getting involved was intoxicating," Solomon said. "The whole family gets involved, and everybody's into it. It's a wonderful experience."

It only took one rep (repetition) of 500 pounds for Solomon to win the competition.

"My first attempt was 425 pounds," Solomon said. "My second attempt was 455, and then 475. Then the guy who was running the event asked if I wanted to go for my fourth attempt, and I did."

The runner-up benched one rep of 450 pounds, but that wasn't enough to beat Solomon, who said he was "locked in."

"I felt great," he said. "In this particular competition, I represented the Department of Corrections and East Jersey State Prison. So for this one, I was a little bit more involved."

Solomon, who has been with the department for nearly 10 years, hit the books and educated himself on the science behind weightlifting in order to get to where he is today.

"I played football my whole life, so I always stayed active," said Solomon. "When I joined the department, I lifted weights, but I didn't understand the science behind it. And then I got into powerlifting, and it changed my whole outlook on everything. Every day that you lift, you want to be better than you were the day before. So you keep striving for that as you're training."

Solomon undergoes vigorous training every day. Five hundred pounds may seem like a lot of weight, but during heavy training days he will bench press close to 550 pounds.

"My training is intense," said Solomon. "I train Monday through Saturday, and I'll take Sunday and every other Thursday off. I do weightlifting and powerlifting, and I'll pick a day a week to do cardio, and three days out of the week are double days. And I'll go until I'm exhausted."

While weightlifting and exercising offer a plethora of physical benefits, Solomon explained that they also help mentally.

"I was assaulted back in 2010, and from that assault I developed anxiety," said Solomon. "Fitness took that away. It gave me a way of getting that constant burden off my shoulders."

"Fitness is a way of taking care of yourself," Solomon added. "We lose sight of the fact that we have to take care of ourselves, because we're so busy taking care of other people. We may be trying to find ways to medicate certain aspects of our lives, but fitness can do that for you."

Even during his rest days Solomon chooses to stay active. He may box or do heavy bag work, and on other “rest days” he may use an elliptical or do lightweight bench press reps. However, Solomon said on Sundays he does really try to rest.

“In the fitness world,” he said, “we have to understand that we may put in a lot of time in that gym, but we also have to put in time to rest our bodies and heal. So I may go get massages; I’ll go swimming — something to relax the muscles and actually recover, because you need that.”

How one takes advantage of those rest days will also help during competition time. Like active training, Solomon believes rest days help to get into the state of mind needed to push oneself and win.

“In competitions, you’re going against other people, but you’re also fighting against yourself,” he stated. “Set the bar high for yourself, but also watch your competition, because you want to separate yourself from them. You want to be the best in the room.”

Solomon enjoys training and competing and has the full support of his wife as well as his three sons who are developing an interest in fitness too. He also encourages fellow officers and other public servants to exercise.

“Whatever you enjoy doing, do it,” Solomon suggested. “There are so many realms of fitness. Pick something. Get rid of the stress. Have an active lifestyle — have a healthy lifestyle.”



Officers and civilians from all over the state came to Old Bridge to participate in this year’s Bench for Blue competition.



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Dear NJDOC...

Virginia Middle School Students Pay Tribute to SCO Nikeelan Semmon

By Sarah Olsen and Brooke Waltz

Our names are Sarah Olsen and Brooke Waltz. We are sixth-graders from Page Middle School, Gloucester Virginia. We recently did a project on fallen police officers of the year 2016. Together, we chose an officer, researched him and created a memorial plaque. We believe that every fallen officer deserves to be recognized, remembered and appreciated for their sacrifice.

The officer we chose was Nikeelan D. Semmon. He was a senior corrections officer and worked for your department, the New Jersey Department of Corrections. He suffered from a deadly heart attack at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility in Bordentown, New Jersey. He was in an inmate yard on an extremely hot day. When he was bringing back the inmates, he collapsed. He is survived by his wife, Ebony Semmon; his son, Gavin Semmon; his dad, Clarence Semmon Sr.; and his brother, Clarence Semmon Jr.

We realized Officer Semmon could have chosen any job, but he chose this job, to help keep his community safe.

Other than researching a fallen officer and creating a memorial plaque, our school participated in the Police Unity Tour this year. The riders that visited Page Middle School were from Chapter VIII, based in Florida. They rode into our parking lot on May 10, 2017.

They started in Portsmouth, Virginia, and were riding to the National Law

Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C. They were riding over 240 miles in three days. When the riders arrived, we gave them high fives and cheered them on as they rode by. Once the riders were here, we gave them their memorial plaques to put on their bikes. Also, some of us took pictures with the riders who were riding for a fallen officer. We did this project to show appreciation for those who died in the line of duty. It also meant we were able to support the Police Unity Tour riders whose motto is, "We ride for those who died."

While doing this project, we realized Officer Semmon could have chosen any job, but he chose this job, to help keep his community safe. We also know he chose this job even though every day he would be risking his life. We will always appreciate his sacrifice and hope his family knows that he is gone but will never be forgotten.





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Right Place, Right Time

Officer Saves Victim's Life After Motor Vehicle Accident

The work of a correction officer is not limited to one facility, nor the hours of a shift.

Senior Correction Officer Dennis Laspata was on the way to Sergeants Training at the Correctional Staff Training Academy in Sea Girt on November 4, 2016, when he observed a vehicle in the trees on the side of Route 55 near Mantua Township.

"The car was about 10 feet up with its headlights facing the highway, and it had pushed over some smaller trees that were closer to the road," said Laspata, who has been a correction officer since January 2011 and is assigned to South Woods State Prison.

Laspata, who was carpooling with Senior Correction Officer Delase King, pulled over a safe distance away from the scene to help.

"We saw the driver sitting on the ground, holding his arm in his hand," Laspata recounted. "There was severe trauma. I could tell by looking at him that he had lost a lot of blood."



Senior Correction Officer Dennis Laspata, who has been with the NJDOC since January 2011, poses for his Officer of the Year recognition, which he earned for his efforts in assisting a severely injured victim of a car accident.

Two civilians also stopped to assist, but neither had any first aid training. Laspata had just completed his annual CPR and first aid training course two weeks prior, so he and his fellow officer were able to react quickly to aid the victim.

While King called 9-1-1, Laspata found materials to form a tourniquet for the man's arm.

"I took a stick and my shirt and made a tourniquet to stabilize the man's arm and slow the bleeding," Laspata said. "We waited about 10 to 15 minutes for an ambulance to arrive, and in the meantime I just kept talking to the man to keep him conscious."

Laspata was unsure what exactly happened or how the victim got himself out of the vehicle, but the driver was able to explain that he was on his way to work, and either an axle broke or a wheel fell off. It was apparent at the scene that a wheel was missing from the vehicle, according to Laspata.

When emergency medical technicians arrived, they said that the victim most likely would have bled to death had it not been for the tourniquet applied by Laspata. In fact, rather than remove Laspata's tourniquet, the EMTs applied theirs right over top.

Although Laspata is professionally trained to handle emergency situations such as this, the incident also resonated with him on a personal level.

"It was rough for me to deal with this situation," Laspata said. "My brother lost a leg in a motorcycle accident. That's all I kept thinking about. His life was also saved by a tourniquet."

For his efforts, Laspata was selected by Policemen's Benevolent Association Local #105 as an Officer of the Year, an honor that was bestowed upon him during the organization's annual Officer of the Year Luncheon on May 5.

Laspata attributed his actions to the training he has received during his time with the department.

"You don't know exactly how you're going to respond until something like this happens," said Laspata. "It felt good to know what to do and be able to react instantly."





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Trained to Help

Correction Officer Saves Woman from Burning Building

The skills a correction officer possesses aren't solely utilized within his or her facility. Senior Correction Officer Bryan Bostick of East Jersey State Prison put his skills to the test when his neighbor's home caught on fire last year.

Bostick was on his way home with his fiancé and three-year-old daughter on May 26, 2016, when his fiancé spotted a tower of smoke in the sky around the corner from their house. Bostick followed the smoke to a two-story home a couple blocks away.

There were no fire trucks, ambulances or police cars on scene when he pulled up to the burning house. Bostick, a former volunteer firefighter, quickly got out of his car and headed toward the home.



Officer Bryan Bostick (center) poses with (from left) Major James Jones, Commissioner Gary Lanigan, fiancé Rina Vedia and Administrator Patrick Nogan of East Jersey State Prison during the July 30 Correction Officer Day Departmental Service Awards ceremony on the grounds of Central Office headquarters.

"As I ran to the house, I noticed a female stuck in the basement screaming for help," said Bostick.

He, along with two off-duty firefighters and an off-duty fire lieutenant who were on scene, approached the basement window on the side of the house and saw that the basement was becoming engulfed in smoke.

"I told the woman to back up," Bostick said. "I grabbed a shovel and broke out the basement window."

Once the window was broken out, the woman pushed a bed underneath the window. She climbed on top of the bed, and the men attempted to pull her through the window. Their first two attempts were unsuccessful, but on the third try, the men were able to pull her to safety. Shortly thereafter, fire trucks arrived on scene to extinguish the fire.

Bostick has been with the department for six years and credits his training and experiences in the prisons for his ability to stay calm in emergency situations.

"I've learned to be observant from this job, to be able to listen to what is transpiring, to work with others to accomplish the same goal, and I've learned to run toward something when everyone else is running away from it," Bostick explained.

"This is what we're trained to do — we're trained to help people," he continued. "In any given situation, we're always trained to help. Nobody's ever prepared for the unknown, but when a situation arises, our training and skills are remembered and utilized."

While Bostick and the others were able to save the woman, who only sustained minor injuries, firefighters were not able to rescue the woman's father, who was trapped on the second floor. Despite the unfortunate circumstances, the outstanding efforts of Bostick and the other three men were not forgotten.

Bostick received the 200 Club of Middlesex County Valor Award earlier this year as well as an award at the New Jersey PBA Local 105 Officers of the Year Ceremony on May 5. In addition, he was presented with a Departmental Service Award by the NJDOC on July 30, which is designated as Correction Officer Day every year.

"We don't do it for the awards," Bostick said. "If someone is in danger, we're going to help them. As a correction officer, that's what it's about."





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Vigilance

Correction Officers Save Women from Car Crushed by Gravel Truck

You never know when your reaction time in an emergency situation may be the difference between life and death.

On May 15, 2017, Senior Correction Officers Eric Parks and John Guidice, both of Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility, were on scene immediately following a collision between a Nissan Altima and a Kenworth T80 tri-axle dump truck carrying approximately 50,000 pounds of gravel.

Parks and Guidice were driving home from work separately on Route 539 when the truck collided with the sedan in Manchester Township.

"I just saw a big cloud of smoke and a lot of stone pour out into the middle of the road, and the truck had turned over on its passenger window," said Parks, who has been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections for nearly five years.

Parks, who was the first one on scene, parked his car and ran to the overturned truck. When he climbed up to the cabin and opened the driver-



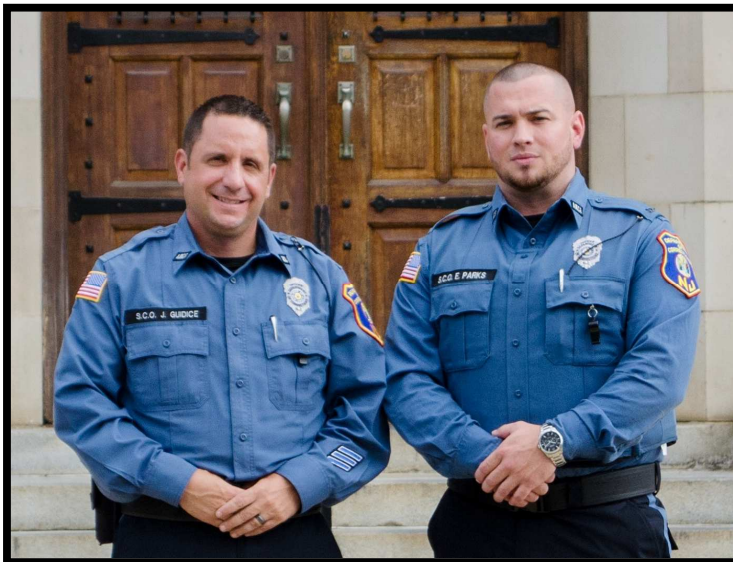
The dump truck was carrying approximately 50,000 pounds of crushed stone when it fell on the sedan.

side door, the driver was hanging upside-down. Parks pulled the driver out of the truck and helped him get a safe distance away from the accident.

"The engine of the truck was still roaring, and there was still a lot of smoke," Parks stated. "When I asked him if he was all right, he just kept saying, 'I killed them two girls. I killed them two girls.'"

"I didn't even see another car, so I had no idea what he was talking about," Parks added.

Trapped under the truck and thousands of pounds of crushed rock was the sedan with two women stuck inside.



Officers John Guidice (left) and Eric Parks have spent their entire NJDOC careers at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility.

"So I turned around and ran over to the other side of the truck, and you could see that the car was just flat," said Parks. "The passenger frame of the car was still intact, and the window was down maybe seven, eight inches, and I could see a female in there, trapped under a bunch of stone."

Parks quickly began digging the woman out. At that time, Parks received assistance from Guidice, who had stopped to help.

"The prison environment teaches you to react in a split-second," said Guidice, who has been with the NJDOC since 1999. "So here I am in my car, with the air conditioner on, listening to the radio, and all of a sudden I jump right into the situation."

Guidice didn't see the sedan either when he first arrived on scene.

"It was just pancaked under all the gravel," said Guidice. "You really didn't realize until you got up close that there was a car trapped under there."

Residents of a nearby neighborhood brought over shovels, and those on scene started digging the women out.

"It took me maybe three or four minutes to dig the first girl out," Parks said. "But even with EMTs and the fire department and others on scene, it took about an hour to dig the girl in the driver's seat out."

Even as the weight of the rocks became unbearable, and the officers felt they couldn't keep shoveling, they knew they could not stop.

"I lost my oldest brother in a car accident," Guidice explained. "I was four years old, and I still remember that day, because I was at that scene. So that's when it really hit me. This was someone's daughter; this is someone's sister. You didn't know at what point that car was just going to give, so I just kept going."

Parks and Guidice commented on the impressive teamwork that developed as different individuals worked together to save the women. They worked alongside Manchester Township police, EMTs, local fire fighters, off-duty New Jersey State Police troopers, several civilians and two fellow NJDOC employees — SCOs Damian Albanese and Charles Burkhardt of the Special Operations Group.

"It was a great team effort," said Parks. "To get all hands on deck like that and to get those girls out of there, that was amazing."

Guidice added: "You had all different ranks from all different departments working together. Everyone knew there was a life to save, and everyone came together and worked as a team."

Once the driver was removed from the vehicle, the EMTs were prepared to treat her.

"When the girl was finally out, she stood up and brushed her thighs off and *walked* to the ambulance," Parks said. "Everyone was just amazed."

Aside from minor cuts and scrapes, the two women and the truck driver did not sustain life-threatening injuries, though they were all transported to the hospital for further evaluation.

"It's almost like it was a scripted ending," said Guidice. "That happens in the movies; that doesn't happen in real life."





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Semper Fi

Position at Training Academy 'Dream Job' for Longtime Marine Manstream

Shortly after Major Wayne Manstream was assigned to the Correctional Staff Training Academy in July 2013, he decided to lead the trainees as they performed their calisthenics.

"As I'm about to get up on the PT (physical training) stand, one of the officers tells me I'll be doing the push-ups," Manstream recalled. "I was a little bit confused by what he said, so I asked him what he meant. He told me, 'You'll do the push-ups, he's going to do the sit-ups,' and so on. I said, 'Let me get this straight. There are going to be four or five of us going up and down on the PT stand, getting breaks, while the trainees are doing the reps?' Then I asked him to hold that thought for a minute."

Manstream positioned himself atop the PT stand and spent the next hour doing calisthenics along with the trainees. In doing so, he delivered a message to his staff.

"I wanted them to know that you need to lead by example," he said.

That unyielding drive is what prompted Aaron Erven, director of the Training Academy, to refer to Manstream as "a model for all correction officers to follow."

Erven added: "Major Manstream has become synonymous with the Correctional Staff Training Academy and the New Jersey Department of Corrections. There isn't a more recognizable member of the custody ranks. And as tough as he is, he cares about staff and their well-being, just as he cares about the trainees and their well-being."



Major Wayne Manstream

Manstream's current stint at the Training Academy, now in its fifth year, actually marks the second time he's served as a training instructor. After spending his first seven years with the department as a member of the custody staff at East Jersey State Prison, he moved to the Training Academy in 1998.



Major Wayne Manstream leads trainees on a cold-weather run.

Following a two-year stay, he returned to East Jersey as a sergeant. He eventually would become a lieutenant, transfer to Northern State Prison, then return to East Jersey as a captain, before his appointment as the head of the custody staff at the Training Academy.

"I very much enjoyed working in the jails," Manstream said, "but this is my dream job.

"I spent a lot of years in the Marine Corps," he continued, "and what I miss most are the Marines themselves. Being here at the Training Academy, in some ways, it's like being back with the Marine Corps. These kids come in and are transformed from trainees who might not be able to walk and chew gum at the same time to individuals who carry themselves as professionals."

Manstream spent more than two decades in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, serving two combat tours and retiring in 2004 as a sergeant major.

"When I was a young Marine, I met another Marine who worked as a plumber at East Jersey State Prison," he remembered. "He convinced me to look into a career with the Department of Corrections, and I'm thankful he did."

So are many others, including Senior Correction Officer Edward Ellis, a longtime instructor at the Training Academy.

"Here is a guy who leads by example, looks the part and believes in fairness," Ellis said. "He's a stand-up person with an in-depth knowledge of our job as officers. He has the ability to break you down, if needed, but even more important, he will always be there to build you back up."

Perhaps the primary reason Manstream subscribes to the need to break down and rebuild trainees is to get them to function as members of a team instead of as individuals. Significantly, Manstream and his staff have a limited amount of time – 14 weeks at the Training Academy, followed by two weeks of facility training – to impart their message on the trainees.

According to Manstream, training can be broken down into three phases. During the initial phase, which lasts three to four weeks, trainees often struggle to adapt to their new surroundings. In the second phase, they begin to make the necessary adjustments. By the time the third and final phase arrives, trainees understand what their instructors are doing and why they're doing it.

"The teamwork concept can be very difficult for some of the young people to learn," Manstream said. "Even if they played organized sports, it's an entirely different level than you're going to need here. Now they're going into a job where they're not only responsible for their own lives, but also for the lives of their fellow officers as well as inmates. I always tell them, if you're not prior service, you're going to be held to a higher standard than you've ever been held to in your life."

For Manstream and his staff, the challenge is to make sure the trainees are well prepared to become correction officers. For inspiration, Manstream need look no further than a letter that hangs on the wall of his office. The correspondence was written to him by a fellow Marine.

"It said there are many ways to measure what you've accomplished in your career – by the ranking you achieve, by the awards you earn," he reported. "Then he goes on to say, 'I'd measure your career a little different. I'd measure your career by looking at those you've mentored and see how far they've gone in their careers.'"

"That meant so much to me, because when I see somebody excel, that's the best compliment I can receive."

